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SUBJECT: OLU OF WARRI: DELTA IS VOLATILE, ITSEKIRI SIT
TIGHT-FOR NOW

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On September 20 the Olu of Warri, the preeminent Itsekiri ruler, told the Consul General that Delta State's deteriorating security situation, compounded by the low number of locals employed by oil companies, has created a volatile situation. Despite poor development in Delta, the Olu said the Itsekiri will wait to see what the Niger Delta Development Commission, Federal, and Delta State governments can achieve. The Olu lamented President Obasanjo's recent decision to defrock Vice President Atiku and truncate his electoral ambitions, seeing this as a sign of the President's lack of political refinement and of a caustic personality. END SUMMARY.

WARRI IN DECLINE?

¶2. (C) Traditional Itsekiri ruler Ogiame Atuwatse II, the Olu of Warri, declared to the Consul General on September 20 that Warri was increasingly volatile because of overcrowding, inter-ethnic tension and lack of economic activity. The federal and state governments had done little. Local workers are incensed by the lack of oil company employment. While companies are finding it increasingly difficult to work in the Delta, their scaled down operations further estrange locals from employment opportunities, the Olu postulated. He stated that Warri needed to expand beyond its current physical boundaries in order to create more space for people to both live and work.

¶3. (C) A densely packed city with massive unemployment and members of rival ethnic groups living in close proximity lent itself to unrest, the Olu hypothesized. In order to create the needed extra space, government would have to build the appropriate infrastructure for city expansion. The Itsekiri will wait to see what the Niger Delta Development Commission, Federal, and State Government will do for development, especially since some construction projects, like bridges and roads, have been recently started, albeit late, the Olu stated.

¶4. (C) The Olu's comments about the Ijaws were deprecatory and evidence of thinly veiled ethnic tensions. With obvious irritation, he claimed the Ijaws had encroached on Itsekiri soil. He complained that not only had the Ijaws interloped but they have stifled the city's economy by overrunning and degrading most of the city's best trading centers. He

asserted that most Ijaws now living around Warri came from other areas, mostly the creeks of Bayelsa State. They were not used to living in a city and they do not consider Warri theirs. Thus, they feel no compunction in abetting the deterioration of the city by mismanagement of the formerly active market and business areas.

15. (C) He complained that wherever Ijaws congregate they "live and destroy" day by day with little regard for future planning or consequences. Atuwatse also commented that cocaine and hard drugs have been recently found in Warri markets, linking these menaces to corruption in the police and the military Joint Task Force, that has as its mandate to protect the area from the Delta militants. Lastly, the Olu blamed the Ijaw and complicit government partners for attacks on oil company boats.

OLD CHUMS FIND NEW PATHS

16. (C) Describing himself as a long-time, but distant, friend of President Obasanjo, the Olu said the President, squabbling with Vice President Atiku and use of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission as a strong arm against real and perceived opponents revealed Obasanjo's true colors. Describing Obasanjo as a person who pitches anger "When he hears the truth," the Olu surmised that Obasanjo also pitched a rage when his third term attempt failed. Now he is looking for culprits to punish, the Olu stressed. The Olu speculated that Obasanjo and Atiku's battle is so fierce, there are few opportunities for either to back down. Lastly, the Olu commented that Obasanjo's desire to acquire significant Transcorp shares is confounding, particularly given his vast wealth.

17. (C) On Delta State elections, the Olu said he has been approached by over a dozen gubernatorial aspirants, but has not offered his blessing to any yet. Atuwatse said he would like to stay out of politics, but does not think this feasible. He intimated Governor Ibori's cousin, the present Secretary of State Government of Delta, will likely receive

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his blessing because, in addition to being Itsekiri, his father was a member of the Olu's court.

COMMENT

18. (C) The Olu of Warri's comments echo what others have said, primarily that Warri is quiet but no one should mistake the quiet for harmony. If the Olu's warnings are prescient, the most likely notes to end the quiet in Warri will be discordant, possibly violent, ones. END COMMENT.

BROWNE